NIETZSCHE ON TRUTH AND PHILOSOPHY

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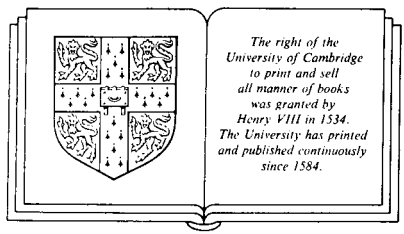

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1

INTERPRETING NIETZSCHE ON TRUTH

Nietzsche's philosophy has recently generated a significant amount of interest and excitement, much of it centered around his position on truth. Considerable hope exists, and much conviction, that Nietzsche has something important to say about truth. This study begins with the problem that confronts anyone with such hopes, namely, that Nietzsche's claims about truth seem hopelessly confused and contradictory. This chapter sets out the problem and gives an overview of the four most influential ways in which those sympathetic to Nietzsche have tried to solve it. After explaining why these solutions seem unsatisfactory, it sketches a solution to the problem that will be defended in the remainder of this book. This solution stresses the development in Nietzsche's position. It will be argued that Nietzsche's position was contradictory in its early and middle formulations, but that he progressed toward and finally arrived at a coherent and defensible position in the works of his final two years.

1. The problem of truth

Nietzsche's position on truth seems to amount to a denial that any human belief is, or could be, true. He proclaims, for exam-

ple, that "truths are illusions we have forgotten are illusions" (TL 84; WL 880–1), that "truth is the kind of error without which a certain kind of being could not live" (WP 493), and that there are "no facts," but "only interpretations" (WP 481). Although these clearest statements of Nietzsche's denial of truth are all from the *Nachlass,* the works he published contain many statements apparently designed to make the same point. He denies, for instance, that we have any organ for knowledge or "truth" (GS 354), claiming that we engage in a "constant falsification of the world by means of numbers" (BG 4) and that even physics is "only an interpretation" (BG 14). He suggests that science at its best keeps us in a "*simplified,* thoroughly artificial, suitably constructed and suitably falsified world" (BG 24) and that the world that concerns us is a "fiction" (BG 34). Finally, in his polemic against the ascetic ideal (GM III), he offers a detailed analysis of the belief in truth as the latest expression of that ideal.

Such claims have made Nietzsche, once associated with the political right, a rallying point for the epistemological left – for those who attack with revolutionary fervor traditional beliefs and attitudes concerning truth, science, philosophy, and the roles of argument and theory. Many assume that Nietzsche has demonstrated that there are no facts and no truths, but "only interpretations," or "different perspectives" on reality. It is therefore apparently a mistake to attempt to give the correct interpretation of anything, including, if not especially, of Nietzsche's own philosophy. Only the misguided, it seems, will even take Nietzsche to be offering arguments or theories, since that would make him captive of the belief in truth that he rejected. His writings can only be supposed to offer a model of what lies on the other side of philosophy – the liberated intellect playing joyfully with itself, rather than engaged in the ascetic activity of offering arguments and theories, or even attempting to say something true.

While this view of Nietzsche and truth may be embraced only by the most radical of contemporary intellectuals, Nietzsche's claims about truth have undoubtedly exerted great influence in more respectable circles. Richard Rorty, whose recent essays (1982 and 1986) emphasize his agreement with Nietzsche's denial of truth, even suggests that we think of the history of twentieth-century Continental philosophy not in terms of the distinctions and transitions between such movements as phenomenology, existentialism, structuralism, and post-structuralism, but as a series of

attempts to come to terms with Nietzsche's claim that truth, like God, is dead. Although the history of twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy would reveal no comparable Nietzschean influence, striking resemblances between Nietzsche's view of truth and that of the early American pragmatists have been noted (by Danto, e.g.), as well as resemblances to Wittgenstein and such contemporary philosophers as Quine, Sellars, Goodman, and Putnam (by West, e.g.). Furthermore, there can be no question that Nietzsche's epistemological and anti-metaphysical views have exerted enormous influence on the contemporary intellectual scene in both Europe and the United States, perhaps especially among literary critics, to such an extent that he is plausibly regarded as "the central figure of postmodern thought in the West" (West, 242).

The problem with this influential view of truth is that it seems to lead Nietzsche into hopeless self-contradiction. There is, first of all, the problem of self-reference. If it is supposed to be true that there is no truth, then there is apparently a truth after all; and if it is not supposed to be true, it seems that we have no reason to take it seriously, that is, accept it or its alleged implications. I shall not at this point consider attempts to meet this objection, for even if it can be met, an equally (or even more) important objection would remain. Despite the recent emphasis on his claims about truth, few would deny that Nietzsche's ultimate importance is connected to what he has to say about values, especially to the challenge he offers to received values. His challenge to received values, and received opinion about values, seems to rest on such claims as the following: that morality is an expression of resentment and of the negation of life; that life itself is will to power; that philosophy, religion, and morality are among the more refined forms of this will; that Western civilization is in grave danger from the death of God and the nihilism bound to grow out of it. It is not my concern here to explain exactly how such claims challenge received values, but it seems clear that they cannot do so unless they are taken to be true. Nietzsche explicitly grounds his denial of morality on the claim that morality is based on error (D 103), and bases his demand that the philosopher "take his stand beyond good and evil and leave the illusion of moral judgment *beneath* himself" (TI VII, 1) on the claim that moral judgment involves illusion. But if truths are illusions, the illusion involved in moral judgment can hardly

give us reason to abandon it, assuming, as we must, that Nietzsche does not demand that we abstain from judgment altogether. Nietzsche's apparent nihilism in regard to truth thus threatens the coherence of his critique of morality, and of his entire philosophy – insofar as the latter commits Nietzsche to certain truths while at the same time it denies that there are any truths. Nietzsche's own practice is apparently at odds with his theory.

A related inconsistency between theory and practice threatens his critique of metaphysics. Although his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), seems committed to Schopenhauer's metaphysics, Nietzsche's enormous influence on twentieth-century Continental philosophy is inseparable from the rejection of metaphysics he announced in *Human, All-Too-Human* (1878) and developed in later works. His passionate claims as to the importance of overcoming metaphysics and its often hidden remnants set him apart from most other critics of metaphysics and account for much of his abiding influence. Yet his own doctrines of eternal recurrence and will to power seem obviously "metaphysical" on any reasonable construal of that term. Nietzsche's mature philosophy seems to make claims to metaphysical truth while at the same time rejecting all such claims.

The obvious conclusion to draw is that there is something seriously wrong with Nietzsche's philosophy. At the very least, it seems that we must reject either his general claim about truth or the specific claims (especially regarding values) that have established him as a thinker to be reckoned with. An interpreter who holds that Nietzsche has something important to teach us about both truth and values must explain how this is possible in the face of the apparently self-contradictory nature of his position on truth. Two main strategies seem available: to show that the self-contradiction is only apparent, or to admit the contradiction but to argue that its presence in Nietzsche's work teaches us something about truth. We find both of these strategies in the literature on Nietzsche. But we also find two very different views of truth attributed to Nietzsche. Since each of the strategies can be coupled with either view of truth, we find four basic approaches in dealing with the problems posed by the apparent contradictions in his position.[1]

1. The suggestion is that all interpretations that offer a solution to the problem under consideration can be situated in relation to the four categories of interpretation set up here, not that each fits neatly into one of them. In particular,

2. Traditional interpretations: Kaufmann and Heidegger

Traditional interpretations attribute to Nietzsche the traditional understanding of truth as correspondence to reality, and the belief that his own views are true in this sense. The two most important traditional interpretations are the empiricist version advanced by Kaufmann and defended more recently by Wilcox, and Heidegger's metaphysical version. Twenty years ago, it could be said that Kaufmann's interpretation was "almost completely dominant in America" (O'Brien, 5), whereas Heidegger's dominated Continental discussion of Nietzsche. Although this dominance has ended, the state of Nietzsche interpretation today owes much to these two interpretations and has been inspired in large part by the desire to find an alternative to them.

Kaufmann's strategy is to show that the contradiction in Nietzsche's position is merely apparent, that Nietzsche does not deny the existence of truth, and that he does not put forward any metaphysical theories. Taking Socrates as Nietzsche's ideal, Kaufmann emphasizes those passages in which Nietzsche seems committed to both the existence and the overriding value of truth. He attempts to explain away Nietzsche's apparent denial of truth as a denial of what Nietzsche called the "true world," the supersensuous and eternal world of the Platonic forms or the Kantian thing-in-itself. Kaufmann's Nietzsche denies the possibility of transcendent or metaphysical truth, which would be correspondence to the way things are in themselves, but affirms the existence of empirical truth. To affirm the existence of truth is simply to say that some statements, propositions, sentences, or utterances are true. According to Kaufmann's interpretation, then, Nietzsche denies that any metaphysical statements are true but accepts many empirical statements as true. Kaufmann can deny any inconsistency between Nietzsche's theory and his practice, for he interprets Nietzsche as putting forward his own views, including the doctrines of eternal recurrence and will to power, as empirical truths. He stresses Nietzsche's claim that the

two important recent interpretations, those of Richard Schacht and Alexander Nehamas, attempt to combine the advantages of two or more of the interpretations I distinguish, which is also my own approach. I sketch my approach later in this chapter, and deal with Schacht and Nehamas at length in Chapters 5 and 7.

eternal recurrence is "the most *scientific* of all possible hypotheses" (WP 55), and interprets the will to power as an unfortunate extension of an empirical hypothesis regarding human motivation (see Chapter 7). Finally, Kaufmann handles the problem posed by Nietzsche's analysis of the faith in truth as an expression of the ascetic ideal by insisting that Nietzsche accepts both the ascetic ideal and the faith in truth (see Chapter 6).

A number of factors have made it difficult for recent interpreters to accept Kaufmann's interpretation. In the first place, if one interprets will to power and eternal recurrence in traditional terms – as straightforward claims about the nature of reality, as claims that are supposed to correspond to reality – it seems implausible to deny their metaphysical character (see Chapters 7 and 8). Further, in many passages Nietzsche clearly rejects much more than metaphysical truth or the thing-in-itself. He appears to deny that there are even any things and to insist that all of our so-called truths are therefore really illusions since they presuppose, state, or imply the existence of things (Megill, 207 ff.). Kaufmann's interpretation does not therefore seem consistent with the Nietzschean texts. Its insistence that Nietzsche embraces both the belief in truth and the ascetic ideal also seems to make it incapable of explaining Nietzsche's belief in the radical character of his position on truth. From beginning to end, Nietzsche's writings convey his belief that he is saying something about truth that is of the utmost importance for understanding human life and that sets him at odds with the whole philosophical tradition (GM III, 23–8, e.g.).

Wilcox defends an interpretation that is very close to Kaufmann's, but actually gives us reason to look for an alternative. In the first place, he admits that he cannot explain away all of the passages in which Nietzsche appears to deny the existence of truth. He argues that, on balance, we have more evidence that Nietzsche accepts the existence of empirical truths than that he rejects all truth. Secondly, although Wilcox agrees with Kaufmann that much of Nietzsche's apparent denial of truth is only a rejection of the "true" world, that is, of metaphysics, he thinks that it has another source in Nietzsche's view that concepts always falsify reality. I will argue in Chapter 4 that Wilcox here makes an important contribution to the understanding of Nietzsche's position. However, it also gives us reason to reject the view, which Wilcox shares with Kaufmann, that Nietzsche allows for

the possibility of obtaining empirical truth, since such truth is obtainable only by means of concepts. If Nietzsche believes that concepts always falsify reality, it is difficult to see how we can explain away his denial of truth.

Heidegger offers a version of the traditional interpretation insofar as he insists that Nietzsche's claims about truth presuppose the correspondence theory of truth (1961, I, 621) and that the doctrines of eternal recurrence and will to power are put forward as truths in this traditional sense (I, 621–55). But his reading is not vulnerable to the objections raised above to Kaufmann's. In the first place, he rejects an empiricist construal of the will to power and the eternal recurrence. Although he considers Nietzsche the great critic of metaphysics, he believes that these central Nietzschean doctrines are themselves metaphysical, that they are answers to the traditional questions of metaphysics concerning the essence and existence of what is. Secondly, rather than attempting to explain away Nietzsche's denial of truth, he presents it as the ultimate consequence of Nietzsche's acceptance of the "metaphysical" conception of truth as correspondence to reality (*Einstimmigkeit mit dem Wirklichem*). Finally, Heidegger has perhaps done more than anyone to bring out the radical character of Nietzsche's claims about truth through his attempt to show their connection to nihilism and to the modern "technological" attitude towards the world.

Yet, Heidegger escapes the difficulties of the empiricist interpretation only at the cost of doing nothing to dissolve the apparent contradictions in Nietzsche's positions on truth and metaphysics. His Nietzsche remains caught in the net of the correspondence theory of truth, and of metaphysics in general, even while he delivers his fatal objections to them. This does not give us sufficient reason to reject Heidegger's interpretation, since he does not claim that Nietzsche's position is internally consistent. But it does give us reason to be very careful since Heidegger has so little incentive to look for an account that would dissolve the apparent contradictions in Nietzsche's philosophy. His use of Nietzsche's philosophy to support his own depends on interpreting it so that Nietzsche's claims about truth and metaphysics are inconsistent with his practice.

Heidegger's later philosophy is directed toward a recovery of the sense of Being, the acknowledgement of Being as Being. This acknowledgement, he tells us, "means allowing Being to

reign in all its questionableness . . . ; it means persevering in the question of Being" (II, 338; trs. 201). His early philosophy had already insisted that Being had been forgotten or suppressed within the metaphysical tradition of previous philosophy. Metaphysics might seem to be concerned exclusively with Being, since it asks not about a particular kind of being (or about some aspect of such), but about beings as such, that is, the Being of beings. Heidegger claimed, however, that in their efforts to ascertain the Being of beings, philosophers have covered up the prior question as to what Being itself is. They had taken for granted an understanding of Being – for example, as enduring presence – which they failed to recognize as such.

Heidegger presents the phenomenological analysis of *Being and Time* as preparation for a "fundamental ontology" that would provide the missing account of Being itself by uncovering the original experiences of it that have been covered up in and by the philosophical tradition. That this project is abandoned, or at least transformed, in Heidegger's later philosophy is indicated by his insistence that "any discussion of 'Being itself' must always remain interrogative" (II, 338; trs. 201). Rather than giving an account of Being, Heidegger now insists only on keeping alive the question of Being, which includes promoting the recognition that the question can never be closed, that thinking must remain open to the possibility that more primordial or new determinations of Being may always be disclosed. Of course, this presupposes that some determination of Being has been disclosed. Heidegger agrees, claiming that metaphysics is itself the history of Being, a history in which Being discloses itself as withdrawn or concealed. Through his reading of the history of philosophy as the history of Being, Heidegger aims at a recovery of the sense or mystery of Being, which is at the very least a sense of a power that cannot be brought under human control or domination. Such a recovery would also involve a recovery of the original and nonmetaphysical sense of truth as the unconcealment of Being, and a conception of human beings (*Dasein*) as shepherds of the mystery of Being, keepers of the house of Being – that is, as ones whose role it is to let Being be, to let the Being of beings disclose itself, instead of insisting on the domination or mastery of beings, in accord with the spirit of technology that Heidegger considers the fulfillment of metaphysics.

Since Nietzsche calls Being an "empty fiction" (TI III, 2), he

would seem more likely to consider Heidegger's position nonsensical than to offer support for it. Things look somewhat different, however, once Nietzsche's positions are taken to be contradictory in the way Heidegger claims. If the great critic of metaphysics was himself a metaphysician, something about the nature of metaphysics must have escaped him. If Nietzsche's denial of truth is the ultimate consequence of his acceptance of the correspondence theory of truth (I, 622), and yet he cannot refrain from presenting his own doctrines as true, we need a different conception of truth. These points open the door for Heidegger to present his own account of metaphysics as an explanation for Nietzsche's blindness, and his own attitude towards Being and conception of truth as the direction in which Nietzsche points us.

Heidegger suggests that Nietzsche's blindness concerning truth and metaphysics is the blindness to Being characteristic of metaphysicians. Nietzsche's understanding and rejection of metaphysics is itself metaphysical, according to Heidegger, for it ignores Being and understands metaphysics instead in terms of values. That is, Nietzsche understands metaphysics as the acceptance of a true or transcendent world that devalues this world, and eventually leads to nihilism, when the values protected by metaphysics are devalued. Nietzsche aims to overcome nihilism by overcoming metaphysics, apparently by means of his doctrines of the eternal recurrence, which rules out a transcendent world, and of the will to power, which provides the principle for a new valuation. However, Heidegger insists that these doctrines are themselves metaphysical since they offer Nietzsche's answer to the question concerning the Being (will to power as the essence, eternal recurrence the mode of existence) of beings. Since one might defend Nietzsche, as Kaufmann does, by claiming that will to power and eternal recurrence do not have the features of metaphysics to which Nietzsche objects – the acceptance of a transcendent world which devalues this world – Heidegger needs a deeper reason for considering Nietzsche's doctrines metaphysical. He offers such a reason by claiming that Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power reduces Being to the status of a value, and is therefore part and parcel of the metaphysics of subjectivity initiated by Descartes.

According to Heidegger, with Descartes the human being or *Dasein* is transformed into the subject – the substance or underlying support, that which lies at the foundation of beings. Given the

procedure of doubt followed in the first *Meditation,* the decision as to what is to count as a being comes to rest with human beings: only what can be presented to them as indubitable counts as a being; only what they can be certain of is true. Human beings are thus established "in a position of dominance" in relation to everything that is (II, 146; trs. 100). Since Nietzsche attacks Descartes' subject as a fiction of logic, he would hardly seem to be a follower in this regard. According to Heidegger, however, he does follow Descartes in that he makes human beings the subject or foundation of things, the difference being only that the Nietzschean subject is not a spiritual ego, but the body, interpreted as a center of drives and affects, that is, as will to power. Like its Cartesian counterpart, this Nietzschean subject disposes over the whole of beings, providing the "measure for the beingness [*Seiendheit*] of every individual being" (II, 171; trs. 121). The will to power is the other side of the metaphysical coin of Nietzsche's claims about truth. In positing error as the essence of truth (i.e., in claiming that truths are illusions), according to Heidegger, Nietzsche "fashions for the subject an absolute power to enjoin what is true and what is false," and thus what is and what is not a being (II, 199; trs. 145). In other words, Nietzsche regards truths as illusions insofar as, in accord with the doctrine of the will to power, he denies that the Being of things places any limitation on what is true. Instead, what allows anything to count as true is that it serves the interests of the subject, or is posited as true by the subject in accord with its essence as will to power. By means of the doctrine of the will to power, therefore, Being is degraded to the status of a value, "a condition of the preservation and enhancement of the will to power" (II, 232; trs. 176).

The doctrine of the will to power thus leads directly not only to the claim that truths are illusions, but also to Nietzsche's characterization of Being as "an empty fiction," "the last smoke of evaporating reality" (TI II, 2, 4). This is why Heidegger considers it the completion of metaphysics: by reducing Being to a value, the doctrine of the will to power makes the nihilism of the metaphysical tradition, the assumption that Being itself is nothing, a matter of principle. Heidegger understands the nihilism Nietzsche wanted to overcome – the sense of emptiness and purposeless, the devaluation of the highest values and devotion to frenzied consumption – as a loss of any sense of Being and the consequent focus on beings, ultimately as the withdrawal of Being itself.

Heidegger also regards the feature of metaphysics to which

Nietzsche most obviously objected, the acceptance of a transcendent world, as due to the withdrawal of Being. Insofar as a question is raised concerning the Being of beings, it is presupposed that beings are not their own foundation, that they are to be explained in terms of something beyond themselves. But in the absence of a sense of Being, the request for a ground of beings could only lead philosophers to another being, though it had to be a special kind of being, a transcendent being – for example, the Platonic ideas, on the side of essence, and a first cause, God or absolute spirit, on the side of existence. According to this account, the aspect of metaphysics that Nietzsche most obviously rejects – the acceptance of a transcendent or true world – derives from a more fundamental feature that Nietzsche's own philosophy exemplifies: the loss of a sense of, the withdrawal of, Being. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche understands Being in terms of values because Being has totally withdrawn. And he thus brings to completion metaphysics, the history of Being in its withdrawal.

Already in *Being and Time* (section 44), Heidegger treats the correspondence theory of truth as a symptom of the withdrawal (there, the forgetfulness) of Being, a covering over of the idea of truth as the unconcealment of Being. He is therefore able to treat it in *Nietzsche* as part and parcel of the metaphysical understanding that finds its completion in the denial of Being, which makes truths in the sense of correspondence impossible, in Nietzsche's terms, "errors" or "illusions."

The contradictions in Nietzsche's account of truth and metaphysics thus allow Heidegger to give Nietzsche a place in his history of metaphysics, and to view him as pointing the way to Heidegger's own philosophy. Heidegger's is a powerful interpretation that has understandably exerted tremendous influence on those working within the Continental tradition. However, as I explain in the next section, interpreters have become increasingly unwilling to draw Heideggerian lessons from the apparent contradictions in Nietzsche's philosophy.

3. Nontraditional interpretations: the "new Nietzsche"

The weaknesses in Kaufmann's interpretation and the search for an alternative to Heidegger's have contributed to the rise of the "new Nietzsche," a Nietzsche with nontraditional ideas con-

cerning truth. I classify as radical or nontraditional interpreters who take Nietzsche's claim that truths are illusions to state his ultimate position on truth, and who deny that he accepted the traditional understanding of truth as correspondence, or regarded his own doctrines as true in this sense. Like the traditionalist, the radical interpreter has two basic options for dealing with the apparent contradiction in Nietzsche's position on truth: to explain it away or to insist that we can learn something from it. Danto's analytic approach exemplifies the former option, whereas the deconstructionist readings of Derrida and his students embody the latter.

The analytic approach rests on the distinction between theories or conceptions of truth, that is, competing sets of beliefs about the nature of truth. The major options available (see Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion) are the correspondence, pragmatic, and coherence theories of truth. The idea is to dissolve the apparent contradiction in Nietzsche's position by saying that he denies the existence of truth in the sense of denying that human beliefs correspond to reality, but he affirms the truth of his own claims in the sense specified by the pragmatic or coherence theories. Danto does remove some of the appearance of contradiction in this way (see Chapter 2). His Nietzsche calls truths "illusions" because he denies that our truths correspond to reality, yet he affirms the truth of certain theories and beliefs in the pragmatic sense of truth, which, according to Danto, means only that they "facilitate life" (71). However, even if Nietzsche is a pragmatist in this sense about empirical theories (see Chapter 2 for reason to doubt this), Danto himself admits that he is not when it comes to the doctrines of eternal recurrence and will to power. These doctrines, Danto makes clear, are metaphysical doctrines and are supposed to correspond to reality (96 ff.). Danto makes no attempt to show how this can be reconciled with Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics. Danto's interpretation thus seems to warrant Rorty's conclusion that "James and Nietzsche made parallel criticism of nineteenth-century thought," but that "James' version is preferable, for it avoids the 'metaphysical' elements in Nietzsche which Heidegger criticizes, and, for that matter, the 'metaphysical' elements in Heidegger which Derrida criticizes" (1982, xviii).

Bernd Magnus has done more than any other proponent of the analytic strategy to avoid construing Nietzsche as a metaphy-

sician. Interpreting the eternal recurrence as an imperative and a myth (see Chapter 8), and the will to power as a metaphilosophical doctrine about the nature of philosophy and theory, Magnus avoids construing either as a metaphysical doctrine. But he admits that his account does not remove all appearance of contradiction, since Nietzsche would still have to regard the will to power as simply true (1978, 201) – that is, as corresponding to the nature of philosophy and theory. Since this seems inconsistent with Nietzsche's denial of truth, the analytic strategy seems unable to explain away the apparent contradictions in his position.

The deconstructionist strategy admits the contradictions, but denies that they pose a problem. Derrida formulates the basis for this strategy as follows:

> There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to attack metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is alien to that history [of metaphysics]; we cannot utter a single destructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulation of precisely what it seeks to contest (1978, 280).

Derrida here responds to Heidegger's interpretation. If metaphysical assumptions are built into our grammar and vocabulary, and we cannot therefore utter a single proposition without presupposing them, Nietzsche could not reject metaphysics without at the same time being caught up in it. This implies that it is only to be expected that Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics would involve him in self-contradiction, but that this does not indicate his failure to think deeply enough about the nature of metaphysics, or the need to go beyond Nietzsche to Heidegger.

Equating Nietzsche's "critique of metaphysics" with "the critique of the concepts of Being and truth" (1978, 280), Derrida evidently thinks Nietzsche criticizes as metaphysical any belief that is presented as the truth or that attributes to the world a stable being or presence. Since this seems to make metaphysics coextensive with rational-discursive thought in general, it seems clear why Nietzsche could not simply reject or abandon metaphysics. The idea seems to be that the world is a ceaseless flux of becoming in which nothing is anything long enough to allow true beliefs about it. That metaphysics is built into our language

thus amounts to the claim that our language is not suitable for portraying this Hericlitean world, that it always introduces stability and the presumption of truth. But why not conclude, then, that Nietzsche was simply confused when he tried to reject metaphysics, that we are simply stuck with metaphysics in the widened sense in which the term is used here? Deconstructionists respond that Nietzsche's writings show us that we can reject metaphysics, by undermining it from within.

Paul de Man has offered one of the most persuasive accounts of how Nietzsche can consistently reject metaphysics by deconstructing it, subverting it from within.[2] He seems to rely on an implicit distinction between what a statement literally asserts and what it does or shows. We find in Nietzsche's writings statements with obvious metaphysical content, and if we are only concerned with what is literally asserted, we must interpret Nietzsche as a metaphysician who was unable to remain consistent with his own critique of metaphysics. If we concentrate instead on what is being done by means of language, de Man suggests, we discover that these metaphysical statements actually undermine their own authority and reveal their own inadequacy. Statements are thus able to show what they cannot literally assert without falling into self-contradiction: for example, that all language is metaphorical (based in rhetoric rather than logic) and that statements are therefore unable to correspond to anything nonlinguistic (or, in Nietzsche's terminology, are "illusions"), contrary to what metaphysics would require (see Chapter 3). De Man seems to think that we can show the limits of rational-discursive thought by revealing its origin in rhetoric or metaphor, but that this origin cannot simply be asserted because the assertion would presuppose the validity or autonomy of rational-discursive thought. The apparent contradictions between Nietzsche's theory and practice of metaphysics do not, therefore, reveal any inadequacy in his philosophy, since only by means of such contradictions can the illusions of metaphysics be exhibited.

But we should not take this to mean that Nietzsche, or we

2. See Clark, 1987, for an attempt to show the plausibility of de Man's approach, as well as reasons for rejecting it, in the case of BT. My forthcoming paper, "Language and Deconstruction," attempts to strengthen the case against de Man's deconstructive approach by combining the argument of the 1987 paper with the one I give against de Man's interpretation of TL in Chapter Three of this study.

ourselves, can therefore possess the truth. If we could, Nietzsche would be wrong when he claims that truths are illusions. And Nietzsche's own situation would once again be inconsistent with his assertions: he would possess the truth while claiming that we are all caught in error. To avoid thereby rendering Nietzsche's philosophy inconsistent, de Man insists that Nietzsche remains caught in the same errors he exposed. Nietzsche himself inevitably claims to possess the truth (including, I presume, when he claims that truths are illusions). His own work therefore remains steeped in the errors it denounces, but it thereby remains internally consistent. Thus, according to de Man, the "allegory of errors" we find in Nietzsche's writings is "the very model of philosophical rigor" (118).

Sarah Kofman, also writing under Derrida's influence, suggests a way of making Nietzsche's rejection of metaphysics consistent with his practice without accusing him of error when she denies that his apparently metaphysical doctrines are supposed to be true. She denies metaphysical status to the doctrine of the will to power, for instance, on the grounds that it is not designed to give us "the truth of Being" (136) but is instead a metaphorical expression, based on a political model, of a method of dealing with interpretations (136–7), one which treats them as symptoms of instincts, sets of values, and, finally, of health or illness. The doctrine of the will to power is a hypothesis about interpretations and is therefore itself an interpretation rather than the assertion of a truth. Yet we cannot consider it merely "one hypothesis among others" (203) because Nietzsche clearly regards it as superior to other interpretations or hypotheses. But according to Kofman, this is not because it represents the truth, but because it permits the greatest "enrichment and embellishment of life" (202). The will to power is therefore "not a revelation but a justification of Being" (201), in the sense that it affirms life in its fullness, that is, in the multiplicity of its possible interpretations. It does this by allowing every interpretation its own place and justification in the overall economy of life, as the expression of some particular set of instincts or constellation of life. Kofman can therefore say that Nietzsche's preference for the hypothesis of the will to power is based on his belief that it affirms life and is indicative of the fullness of life, just as she has earlier said this about his preference for the metaphorical over the "demonstrative" (rational-discursive) style: